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FROM THE DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Science and
Education
Administration

Washington, D.C.
20250

MAY

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CURRENT SERIAL RECORDS

April 11, 1979

My January 22, 1979, letter dealt with SEA's FY 1980 budget, which is in line with the Administration's policy to limit Federal expenditures to the absolute minimum required to meet the most pressing national concerns. The President has made clear his determination to control inflation, to cut back the Federal deficit, and to balance the national budget. The FY 1980 Budget presents SEA managers and employees with the challenge of participating with the President in meeting these urgent objectives. I want to share some plans and hopes I have for our future as we do this.

First, we need to view the proposed budget from the perspective of national concerns and in a context broader than our own Agency. Both legislative and executive branches of government are emphasizing increased accountability and the need to examine programs in detail to meet changing priorities. And the trend toward a government-wide reduction in Federal civilian employment is reflected in SEA's ceiling reductions.

From my perspective, I believe the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Program funding will be much more selective in the future than it has been in the past. Some new programs will be funded. Some current programs will be increased. However, these totals may be less than totals from programs that are reduced or terminated.
2. Current reduction in employment ceilings are real and must be faced. To hope for significant increases is unrealistic.
3. Adjustments to meet current and future personnel and funding constraints is a SEA-wide responsibility.

In short, I conclude that SEA is facing changes that are likely to be extensive. Among other things we must assess priorities, our missions and our policies. The mix of program activities must be examined along with the mix of skills and services available in SEA and those available from other sources. If we summon our creative energies in a positive self-assessment and program evaluation, I believe we can seize upon these efforts as an opportunity to revitalize ourselves and our Agency.

Now, I want to tell you about some actions that we are taking:

First, a small group is conducting an analysis of SEA support functions which may be contracted out or otherwise handled to identify personnel slots that can be reassigned to high priority research and education programs within SEA. This group is also assessing the possibilities of combining or eliminating various support functions and considering other alternatives for carrying out our work, including possible realignments within the organization. Any potential impact on equal employment and affirmative action programs will be identified and closely monitored.

A second group is conducting a detailed assessment of SEA programs. The Decision Unit study teams charged with preparing material for the SEA FY 1981 budget are involved here. (I'll cover more details on the FY 1981 budget and the teams a little later in this Letter.) These study teams are now looking at present levels of effort, redistribution of resources, and the potential scope of each program in terms of both a smaller share of resources and a larger portion (for example, plus and minus 10 percent).

These two groups will have a range of options prepared for review by SEA management by about June 15. As we consider these options, we will be looking for the best ways of reducing or eliminating impacts on personnel while maintaining or increasing high priority programs.

During the challenging months ahead I assure you that three factors will be kept in mind:

1. People from all levels in SEA will continue to be involved in various processes of our deliberations.
2. Increasing efficiency while preserving and enhancing the excellence that has always been the hallmark of our efforts is the goal on which we will focus.
3. Two-way communication will be maintained within the constraints of orderly management and timely decisionmaking. I need, and all other SEA managers need to know what you think, how you feel, and what you suggest. At the same time you will want and need accurate information from us. You will be hearing more on specific plans of action within the next week or so.

Congressional committee hearings on the SEA FY 1980 budget have been completed. I would characterize them as good hearings. Interest was high, discussions were spirited, and in general, there was lively exchange of information concerning the SEA programs. We have no reason to believe that we'll be asked for extensive additional testimony. While no firm dates have been set for Congressional committee reports, we are

expecting them later this spring. Testimony from outside witnesses, including many of our cooperators, has been taken by the committees. Much of this was highly supportive of programs in which SEA participates.

In regard to the FY 1981 budget preparation, Decision Units have been identified, and DU managers and their team members have been selected from all parts of SEA. These people have an important function. Each team is responsible for preparation of budget material for each decision package making up their Decision Unit. The teams must understand and reflect the priorities of all of us in SEA, both field and headquarters, our partners in the States, professional societies, commodity groups, the Joint Council, the Users Advisory Board, ECOP, ESCOP, RICOP and others.

Final decisions and selections must be made soon. However, we consider the 1981 budget process still open for additional input and comments from anyone. Correspondence to any of the team managers may be addressed: c/o Jim Smith, USDA-SEA, Room 28, Bldg. 005, Agricultural Research Center, Beltsville, Md. 20705. Decision Units and managers are:

Crop Production -- Thomas Army
Crop Protection -- Milton Ouye
Animal Production -- Larry Miller
Animal Protection -- Earl Splitter
Food Quality and Safety -- Calvin Columbic
Food Protection, Distribution and Exports -- Jesse Goble
Technology and Safety of Non-Food Agriculture Products -- Nelson Getchell
Economics and Farm Management -- James Hall
Human Nutrition -- Patricia Swan
Family and Consumer Resource Development -- Frances Magrabi
Youth Development -- Rhonwyn Lowery
Rural and Community Development -- Marvin Konyha
Land and Water Resources -- David Farrell
Forestry and Range Resources -- Paul O'Connell
Technical Information Systems -- Samuel Waters
Research, Extension, and Teaching Capacity Maintenance (Pay Act Comparability) -- Thomas Ronning
Facilities Development and Equipment -- Donald Black
International Programs -- Sheila Gillette

We have had excellent response to our call for research preproposals for the FY 1979 Special Research Grants Program. The preproposals have been reviewed by peer panels and SEA-CR has already notified those selected for full proposal development. Peer panels will meet for final evaluation later in April and early May. Notification of grant awards except those in animal health will start in mid-May. Animal health awards start June 4. Topics included and numbers of preproposals received: Alcohol and Industrial Hydrocarbons (54); Animal Health (660); Genetic Vulnerability (53); Marketing, Transportation and Storage (28); Pest Management (54); and Soybean Research (41).

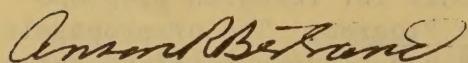
At the close of the proposal period for the FY 1979 Competitive Research Grants Program, we had received 858 new proposals. Peer review panels are still meeting and will do so into June. Notification of grant awards for the first series of selected projects will be made the middle of May. Proposals (including two continuing projects): biological stress (272); genetic mechanisms (142); and nitrogen fixation (104) --all under plant biology; photosynthesis (118); human nutrition (224).

The 1977 Farm Bill required the preparation of a number of special reports. The status of several of these:

1. Comprehensive Plan for Implementing the National Food and Human Nutrition Research and Education and Information programs: Plan completed by the Department's Human Nutrition Policy Committee; receiving final Department review before submission to Congress.
2. Annual Report of the Joint Council on Food and Agricultural Sciences: Report completed and submitted to the Secretary.
3. Annual Report of the Research and Extension Users Advisory Board: Report completed and submitted to Congress and the President.
4. The evaluation of the economic and social consequences of the cooperative extension system: Interim report completed. A special core staff is working on all parts of the final report, which is due January 15, 1980. The staff includes SEA-Extension and State personnel from Agriculture and Natural Resources, Home Economics (including nutrition), 4-H Youth, and Community and Rural Development.

I'm pleased to announce three key appointments to the SEA Equal Opportunity Staff: Marva Nesbit Jett, Federal Women's Program Manager; Louise P. Ashton, Equal Opportunity Program Analyst; Oddie L. Stevens, Civil Rights Compliance Review Officer. These three individuals bring to SEA excellent experience with equal opportunity programs where the primary ingredients for success were commitment, responsibility, accountability, and cooperation. They will be valuable assets to SEA.

Sincerely,



ANSON R. BERTRAND
Director
Science and Education